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C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 002134

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RS, IR, IZ, VE, CU, PO
SUBJECT: PORTUGUESE POLITICAL DIRECTOR EXPOUNDS ON RUSSIA,
IRAN, EU, AND MORE

Classified By: POL CHIEF TROY FITRELL, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

11. (U) Summary: The Portuguese MFA's Director General for Foreign Policy expounded on several issues to us recently, including Russia, Iran, Latin America, Iraq, Afghanistan, the NATO Summit, and the EU Presidency. The consonance between his views and ours speaks clearly to Portugal's reliability as an ally and partner. End summary.

12. (U) At a September 25 luncheon hosted by Ambassador Hoffman at his residence, Portuguese Ministry for Foreign Affairs Director General for Foreign Policy Manuel Tomas Fernandes Pereira explained GOP views on a number of foreign policy issues, including regional organizations, Venezuela, Cuba, Iran, Russia, and the upcoming United Nations Security Council election.

Russia, Iran (and the EU Presidency)

13. (U) Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Portuguese Foreign Minister Amado in Lisbon September 18 before both Russian and Portuguese delegations went to New York for the U.N. General Assembly. Lavrov's public statements noted that Russia was interested in improving policy coordination between Russia and the EU. As Portugal will hold the European Union Presidency in the second half of 2007, it was important to meet with Portuguese officials well in advance.

14. (C) Fernandes Pereira said the meeting was much more relaxed than was the case with many of Lavrov's predecessors. The meeting, he said, was conducted entirely in English and consisted entirely of conversation; no prepared statements were made by either party. Lavrov, according to Fernandes Pereira, was concerned about mounting tensions in Georgia, specifically in South Ossetia. Fernandes Pereira noted that Portugal -- and by extension the EU -- depends on Russia to pressure Iran, which means a nuanced policy in nearby Georgia is critical. Fernandes Pereira opined that Russia is far more amenable to such pressure on Iran than is China, noting that at least Russia is willing "to say the right things," if not necessarily to do them.

15. (C) Warming to the subject of Iran, Fernandes Pereira noted that Portuguese policy is to engage Iran, but that Iran must provide concrete examples of cooperation. Fernandes Pereira noted that the EU has given Iran the opportunity to

negotiate, but now the Iranians must do so or suffer the consequences. He cautioned that Portugal would be reluctant to proceed with sanctions at this point, noting that sanctions have been imposed in other circumstances with little impact. He continued that any future sanctions on Iran must be carefully designed to produce a desired outcome, but this would be no easy task. Fernandes Pereira noted that they stressed the same firm line on Iran to the Syrian Information Minister Mohsen Bilal, who visited August 24 and who Fernandes Pereira characterized as surprised by Portugal's stance.

Latin America

¶16. (C) Regarding Venezuela, Fernandes Pereira noted that there are half a million Portuguese nationals and dual nationals in Venezuela, which constrains the public actions that Portugal can take in response to the antics of Venezuela's President Chavez. Fernandes Pereira suggested that Chavez's actions are far less problematic than his rhetoric, but agreed that Chavez's rhetoric was itself damaging to the conduct of diplomacy in the region.

¶17. (C) Fernandes Pereira underscored the importance of Western nations coordinating efforts to ensure a peaceful transition in Cuba following Castro's death. Top priorities, he said, must be to ensure selection of a successor through democratic elections and continued provision of social services to the Cuban people to avoid any negative impact on the transition to democratic rule.

¶18. (U) Fernandes Pereira lauded his meeting with WHA A/S Tom Shannon on the margins of last May's Bilateral Commission meeting in Washington, emphasizing their discussion of Cuba as particularly useful. Noting Portugal's interest in a

range of Western Hemisphere issues, he characterized it as, "the best meeting I had."

¶19. (C) Fernandes Pereira reiterated that Portugal intends to support Guatemala's bid for a rotating seat on the United Nations Security Council instead of the Venezuelan candidacy, and had stated this policy to Portugal's Lusophone colleagues in the Community of Portuguese Speaking Nations (CPLP).

Iraq and Afghanistan

¶10. (C) Fernandes Pereira noted that he had visited Iraq in February 2004, before sectarian violence had reached its zenith. The situation was, he opined, much worse now than during his visit. Fernandes Pereira qualified his comments somewhat by suggesting that the sectarian violence was not merely a result of ethnic tensions, but was actively fomented by outside sources.

¶11. (C) Fernandes Pereira made specific mention of Portuguese forces serving in Afghanistan. Although they are few in number, Fernandes Pereira noted that they serve "without caveat," and are available for whatever duty is required of them. He noted that the Portuguese company currently in Afghanistan is headed to Kandahar. Fernandes Pereira then criticized "those nations" that send troops but destroy their utility by caveats that they can only serve in specific zones or in specific roles. Fernandes Pereira also noted that Portugal believes that ultimately, the best solution to Afghanistan's drug trade might prove to be a UN program to buy all of Afghanistan's poppy production.

2008 NATO and Lusophone Summits (and the EU Presidency)

¶12. (C) Fernandes Pereira confirmed that Portugal would be a candidate to host the 2008 NATO Summit, dedicated to the topic of enlargement, and that this is a top priority of the Prime Minister. He noted surprise that the 2009 Summit had already been awarded to Germany; in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Washington Treaty Fernandes Pereira had expected it to be held in Washington. Fernandes Pereira also noted that in the same year Portugal will host the CPLP

Summit.

WHO Vote, Americans in the MFA

¶13. (C) Fernandes Pereira noted that in the upcoming vote for the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Portugal was bound to vote for a candidate from the CPLP, at least in the first round. Fernandes Pereira suggested that they would likely support the Mozambican candidate at first, but may switch to the Spanish or Mexican candidate should the Mozambican falter. Fernandes Pereira also noted that the MFA would welcome the assignment of an American in the MFA's EU Presidency Office either during the preparations for the EU Presidency or during the Presidency itself, as part of the USG-GOP diplomat exchange program.

Comment

¶14. (U) While Fernandes Pereira clearly knew who his audience was at this meeting, his statements accurately reflect Portuguese foreign policy priorities. The many examples of consonance between his statements and U.S. foreign policy priorities reflect the amity between our governments and the reliability of Portugal as an ally and partner.
Hoffman